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“The course of true love never did run smooth”: The Late Elizabethan Sonnet and Shakespearean Criticism

Rémi Vuillemin

> [Margreta de Grazia] argues that the ‘Shakespeare’ which we will study is the construction of the late eighteenth century and, above all, of the editorial labors of Malone. In other words, ‘our’ Shakespeare is (or at least was until recently) the contemporary of the French Revolution rather than of the Armada.[1]

1 Peter Stallybrass’s summary of Margreta de Grazia’s *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790s Apparatus*[2] encapsulates some of the problems one still encounters while working on Shakespeare’s contemporaries. To a large extent, and at least until recently, criticism of the Elizabethan sonnet, for instance, was still very much dependent on criteria of literary value that rose to prominence in the late 18th century and that had been firmly established by the early 20th century.[3] But the rise of Shakespeare at the time of the French Revolution also echoes more specifically the reception of his works in France, not just in the 19th century, but also well into the 20th century. Despite the changes that occurred in the literary canon, I will argue, the criteria of literary appreciation have maintained a remarkable degree of consistency over more than the last two centuries.

2 In January 1758, the *Literary Magazine* published a table that compared several great English authors, and went so far as giving them marks out of twenty according to four criteria: genius, judgement, learning and versification.[4] At the dawn of the Romantic Age, Shakespeare’s specific personal talent was already recognized (genius: 19; judgement: 14; learning: 14, versification: 19). Among the other Elizabethans who appear in the table, only two have written sonnet sequences: Spenser (genius: 18; judgement: 12; learning: 14, versification: 18) and Drayton (genius: 10; judgement: 11;

learning: 16, versification: 13). The marks attributed to each of these three poets reflect both the 18th-century canon and its remarkable stability until today. Among sonneteers, Spenser stands second to Shakespeare only, while Drayton belongs to the category of minor poets important enough to be mentioned. Drayton is a particularly interesting example in so far as he has received very little critical attention in France as compared to English-speaking countries. It is perhaps too easy and somewhat tautological to say that the study of major authors has been a cause for neglect of other, less well-known poets. The case of Drayton is, however, particularly interesting. He was a rather popular author in the late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean eras, called for example "the English Ovid" by William Alexander,[5] and Harold Bloom included him in his account of the western canon.[6] Why is it, then, that despite frequent mentions in Anglo-Saxon criticism, Drayton, among other poets, has received little attention in France? And more generally, has the critical treatment of Shakespeare been an impediment to the study of other late-Elizabethan sonneteers in France?

3 Answering these questions exhaustively would require taking into account many more factors than one can hope to cover in a short article. My aim here is therefore merely to raise a few hypotheses about the French relative lack of interest for Elizabethan sonnets in the last fifty years or so. In particular, I wish to show how a cultural factor (i.e., a conception of literature that the reception of Shakespeare entailed and/or validated) intertwined with certain features of the French academic field that are only indirectly related to research strategies. To do so, it will first be necessary to try and situate the reception of Shakespeare's works and the Elizabethan sonnet in a wider time-frame.

A few historical landmarks: the Romantic and post-Romantic reception of Shakespeare

4 It seems that the reception of Shakespeare's works played a role in shaping the quasi-divine figure of the Romantic poet in France, where the "Bard" emerged not only as a great individuality, but also as a nearly god-like prophet. Already, in the last decades of the 18th century, Pierre Le Tourneur affirmed Shakespeare's genius, which he related to his deep sensibility.[7] Shakespeare, lacking education, allowed Nature to express itself through him,[8] and was not constrained by any law.[9] He was presented as a miracle that resuscitated the talent of the great Roman dramatists,[10] and—another commonplace that subsequent admirers of Shakespeare would use—was equal, if not superior, to Euripides.[11] Le Tourneur paved the way for the hyperbolic praise Victor Hugo and his son would lavish on Shakespeare about a century later. François-Victor Hugo's *Les Sonnets de William Shakespeare, traduits pour la première fois en entier* (1857) was, as the title indicates, the first complete translation of Shakespeare's sonnets into French. The three parts of the introduction ("La Renaissance dans Shakespeare", "L'homme dans Shakespeare", "L'humanité dans Shakespeare") betray a desire to show Shakespeare as the very incarnation, not only of his time, but also of mankind. According to Hugo, Shakespeare sought to maintain the original language of the English, as opposed to the members of Elizabeth's court, who tried to sever themselves from the people through the use of the artificial euphuistic language. Shakespeare is therefore opposing the Renaissance itself, which Hugo terms a "classical counter-revolution" ("la contre-révolution classique").[12] In that sense, Shakespeare is not just presented as a literary

revolutionary: Hugo implies that his writing has political significance, giving back to the people the gist of their Saxon identity in the face of the political power that tries to efface the inheritance of the Middle-Ages,[13] using the people's *bon sens* against the conventional and artificial expression of the court.[14] Victor Hugo insists even more than his son on Shakespeare's relationship to an untamed, wild Nature, for example by calling him an ocean-like man ("un homme océan")[15] described in terms of the aesthetic category of the Sublime.[16] What's more, the words Victor Hugo uses to depict Shakespeare's "rebellion" show it is more than just literary.[17] To him, the dramatist takes political significance as well, an incarnation of Hugo's ideals[18] and, according to Richard Wilson, of the Parisian reception of Shakespeare's drama at the time.[19] Shakespeare cannot be contained by rules and conventions and his reach encompasses the totality of dramatic experience, that is, the depth of human interiority.[20]

5 The hyperbolic praise that Hugo father and son heap on Shakespeare relies on a theory of literary creation: great literature is the expression of Nature; it comes out of the depth of human interiority to reach a quasi-divine dimension; a great work of literature can express the essence of a people or at least be a factor of social unity. This Romantic theory of literary creation entails a definition of what bad literature—or poetry—can be: artificial, superficial, mundane, conventional and socially divisive. It is striking that these negative criteria of bad poetry are precisely what Sidney Lee, for instance, saw in the Elizabethan sonnet in general, in Shakespeare's sonnets in particular.[21] To a large extent, the Romantic criteria of literary greatness were here to stay and were consistent with the evolutions of the canon in English-speaking countries.

6 In his introduction to his 1921 anthology of metaphysical poetry, Grierson stated the following:

> Over all the Elizabethan sonnets, in greater or less measure, hangs the suggestion of translation or imitation. Watson, Sidney, Daniel, Spenser, Drayton, Lodge, all of them, with rarer or more frequent touches of individuality, are pipers of Petrarch's woes, sighing in the strain of Ronsard or more often of Desportes. Shakespeare, indeed, in his great sequence, and Drayton in at any rate one sonnet, sounded a deeper note, revealed a fuller sense of the complexities and contradictions of passionate devotion. But Donne's treatment of love is entirely unconventional except when he chooses to dally half ironically with the convention of Petrarchian [*sic*] adoration.[22]

To Grierson, poetry must have the following qualities: individuality, originality and depth, qualities that sound strikingly similar to those Victor Hugo put forward. The first few decades of the 20th century were also those when, along with biographical investigation, another type of criticism, based on sources, themes and imagery, developed. In many ways, the Romantic criteria of literariness remained central in 20th-century criticism of the sonnets, which has to do with the fact that the critical tools still used to deal with the sonnets today were born in the Romantic period, as Christopher Warley has shown.[23]

7 The Romantic and post-Romantic reception of Shakespeare's works and of Elizabethan sonnets in France is therefore a factor to be taken into account. It can seem that the Hugos' praise of Shakespeare was even more vibrant than that the "Bard" received on the other side of the Channel, and this is particularly true of the *Sonnets*, which were not always read enthusiastically in the British Isles in the 19th century.[24] But perhaps more importantly, there were common criteria of literariness that were established

through the study of Shakespearean drama, and that could also define negatively what bad literature was—the sonnets, and even sometimes Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, being often used as instances of such bad literature.

8 It is not my purpose here to depict the changes in literary-criticism in the twentieth century. While the move away from biographical criticism allowed new considerations and renewed interest in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and in the Elizabethan sonnet sequences, [25] it is rather the continuities between the above-described Romantic and Post-Romantic conception of Shakespeare and the French Reception of Shakespeare from the 1960s onwards that I want to stress.

French criticism of the *Sonnets* and the rise of Shakespearean studies in the1960s and1970s

9 The 1960s were a turning point in Shakespearean studies in France, as Jean-Marie Maguin underlines.[26] Until then, a PhD dissertation (or rather the *Thèse d'État*, which could hardly be completed in less than ten years) had to focus on one author's life and works. The rise in the number of students, and, consequently, of university professors, and the advent of structuralism, among other factors, made it easier to suggest innovative topics for doctoral studies, and especially thematic approaches.[27] As Maguin makes clear, it also liberated aspiring PhD students interested in literature and allowed them to work on Shakespeare—something that had been just about unthinkable when the focus of most studies had to be on an author's life and works. This is also the moment when Henri Fluchère, a major scholar from the previous generation, published his *Shakespeare, dramaturge élisabéthain.*[28] In the first few pages of his work, he laments the fact that Shakespeare has become a myth ("On en fait un drapeau, un symbole, presque un mythe") and the idea of a Romantic Shakespeare, who was not only exceptional in the way he created memorable characters, but who also was the lyric poet *par excellence* as well as a great philosopher.[29] He finds the notion of a Romantic Shakespeare meaningless,[30] and sees drama as an expression of the society it is born in. I want to contend here that even if Fluchère tried to distance himself from a Romantic understanding of Shakespeare in his founding work of French Shakespearean criticism, several aspects of the Romantic and post-Romantic approach to Shakespeare remained in his works as well as those of his followers.

10 A few years after the publication of Fluchère's work, in 1970, Jean Fuzier published what is perhaps the first major French work of literary criticism on *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.[31] Fuzier's acquaintance with the recent Anglo-Saxon criticism appears quite distinctly in the course of his analysis,[32] and a very thorough knowledge of the *Sonnets* makes this book a very valuable introduction to Shakespeare's sequence. With hindsight, however, and despite the mention in Fuzier's bibliography of major works of New Criticism,[33] his analyses largely rely on the idea that the *Sonnets* are loosely narrative and biographical. Even if this is less straightforward than in earlier criticism, it is still Shakespeare the man that is at the centre of his analyses, and Fuzier repeats that what differentiates Shakespeare's quatorzains from those of his contemporaries is their sincerity.[34] For him, only Spenser's *Amoretti* and Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* escape the accusation of artificiality, as they are autobiographical. Significantly, he quotes Sidney Lee in his introduction: the other sonneteers are "mere wallowers in the bog that lie at the foot of the poetic mountain".[35] Lee's categories remain prevalent here,

and Shakespeare's Sonnets are superior in so far as they escape any conventionality, even if Shakespeare sometimes resorts to conventions: his sources are then subjected to a "transmutation".[36]

11 Fuzier's essay is not to be opposed to Fluchère's. As a whole, the latter's analyses waver between the rejection of a Romantic perspective and phrasings that are reminiscent of Romantic categories. Shakespeare, for instance, is an "extraordinary, weird and distempered genius that does not fit in our norms, upsets our Cartesian minds and is sometimes repulsive to our taste" [génie déréglé, bizarre, hors du commun. Il échappe à notre norme, il choque notre esprit cartésien et révulse parfois notre goût].[37] Fluchère also replicates a more or less implicit hierarchy of Shakespeare's works that echoes, for instance, Hugo's interest in Shakespeare as a "sublime" author of tragedies first and foremost. Even though Fluchère very cleverly and relevantly insists on the influence of Seneca—rather than Aeschylus—to reconceptualize violence and excess, his phrasings keep strong Romantic accents, [38] and it is still the tragedies that dominate his study. He also insists on the shift from a formalistic and thematic appropriation of Seneca's tragedies to a new sense of the tragic at the beginning of the 17th century that incorporates Seneca's Stoicism as the only possible response to a decaying world.[39]

Periodization and rupture: aspects of the production of the canon in France

12 As Fredric Jameson wrote, "all isolated or discrete cultural analysis always involves a buried or repressed theory of historical periodization".[40] In Fuzier's work as well as in the production of subsequent critics, the focus on tragedy is associated with a specific periodization of Shakespeare's works, in which the 1590s, the decade of artificial and precious poetry, give way to the 1600s, the decade of the great tragedies, but also the time of the rise of a new type of poetry:

> Poets are not content with weaving Petrarchan and Platonic themes into a learned or precious poetry anymore; on the contrary, they attempt to solve in a personal way the insoluble inner contradictions of the simplest concepts or feelings, drawing from a new experience grounded in the duality of the material and spiritual worlds. (Les poètes ne se contenteront plus de broder, sur des thèmes pétrarquéens et platoniciens, une poésie savante ou précieuse, mais ils vont s'appliquer à résoudre en termes personnels les contradictions insolubles que comportent les concepts ou les sentiments les plus simples, à la lumière de l'expérience nouvelle [...] placée sous le signe de la dualité des mondes matériel et spirituel.)[41]

Here, Fluchère is in keeping with the 20th-century redefinition of the poetic canon. In the wake of Grierson and T.S. Eliot, Robert Ellrodt had just introduced the metaphysical poets in France.[42] The interest for metaphysical poetry in academia indirectly contributed to reinforcing the notion of a rupture between the Elizabethan and the Jacobean periods. John Donne was largely regarded as an early Jacobean, rather than late Elizabethan, poet. Despite Fluchère's rejection of a 'Romantic Shakespeare', the Romantic theory of poetry was, to a certain extent, still there, especially in terms of what poetry should not be: artificial, that is, not natural (or 'learned' rather than deriving from experience) and precious (i.e., too formalistic and superficial); in other words, the categories that Fluchère attributes to Petrarchan poetry. Donne was seen as the poetic equivalent of what the late Shakespeare was for drama.[43] It is probably this reconfiguration of the canon, which paralleled the evolution of the canon in English-

speaking countries, along with the subsequent reinforcement of the idea of a historical rupture at the turn of the century, which were most detrimental to the study of the Elizabethan sonnet in France. With the new focus on Shakespeare and on 17th-century poetry, hardly any space was left for the study of Petrarchan poets.

13 The production of books on Shakespeare in French in the subsequent decades was informed by this context. For instance, the vast majority of the books on Shakespeare (including translations) published since 1980 that are listed in SUDOC[44] have to do with the tragedies (and the majority with *Hamlet*). The narrative poems come last, and *The Sonnets* just before them if one excludes translations.[45] This is also reflected in the scientific production of the last thirty years. On the website *theses.fr*, where one can find the titles and summaries of the theses defended in France since 1985, it appears that students have mostly focused their attention on Shakespeare's tragedies; they have worked on Shakespeare's plays rather than on his poems (only two PhDs, one unfinished, deal with *The Sonnets*).[46] More generally, the late 16th- and early 17th-century works under analysis are plays rather than poems, and 17th-century poets are preferred to 16th-century poets. This is definitely not a favourable context for 16th-century poetry.

14 The periodization based on the shift from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean period, from Petrarchan to metaphysical poetry, was justified by the division of Shakespeare's production between early Shakespeare and the late Shakespeare of the great tragedies. This in turn implied an underlying (and maybe somewhat unconscious) teleology according to which Shakespeare's early plays paved the way for the achievements of the great tragedies—a teleology which, applied to poetry, was seen in terms of "rebellion" of the metaphysical poets against their predecessors.

15 It seems fair to insist on the 1960s and the 1970s in the sense that those decades were obviously a defining moment for French academia. To understand the importance of Shakespeare in that context, one has to take into consideration the development of what was later called "French theory" and the role Shakespeare played in it. In his *King of Shadows,* Richard Wilson argues that many authors of what came to be called "French Theory" found in Shakespeare some inspiration that shaped the very fabric of their thoughts. Significantly, many of these authors can be said to have been post-Marxist theorists, and Wilson sees Marx and Engels's Shakespeare as a Parisian Shakespeare:

> [...] although Marx and Engels were "deeply rooted in the German Shakespearean tradition", their Shakespeare enthusiasm was typically Parisian in two crucial respects: they revered the plays not as high art but popular entertainment; and they exalted the Bard not as a reactionary but as a revolutionary.[47]

Tracing the genealogy of French theory, Wilson contends that in France "Shakespeare occupies an oppositional place as *the man of the mob*, in contrast to his establishment as a *man of the monarchy* in the Anglo-Saxon world".[48] For him, "What these 'French theorists' all have in common, it seems, is a Bardolatry ironically at odds with the iconoclasm of those Anglo-American critics who do apply 'French theory' to the *Works*".[49] Wilson draws a surprising conclusion: Shakespeare, a revolutionary, or "a courier for underground resistance" in Aragon's poems,[50] could also be recast into the universalised notion of Shakespeare "always above politics".[51] Whether Shakespeare was politicized or depoliticized, as a "man of the mob" he stood in sharp contrast to poets whose main achievement was to write courtly poetry and could therefore be suspected of being subjected to political powers. The image of Shakespeare as a "revolutionary" or "Résistant" was likely to be inspiring to scholars who admired

works by anthropologists or historians from the Annales School, some of whom had been *Résistants* in World War II. Finally, Shakespeare, as a figure of rebellion against authority much in keeping with its Romantic past, could also be disconnected from a strictly or explicitly political perspective to become a literary rebel rather than a political one—one that expressed, for instance, the essence of true poetry.

How Shakespeare (over)took the *agreg*

16 As a whole, therefore, it cannot be said that the canon in France veers away from what it is in the United Kingdom or the USA. What one could suppose is that Shakespeare's place in the French canon might have something to do with a national narrative of revolution and rebellion—but this in itself would require a whole study, and is at least partly addressed by Wilson.[52]

17 The differences one might find are probably determined first and foremost by the structure of the French academic field. With fewer specialists of English Renaissance literature, the range of analysed literary works and genres could only be more limited in France than in English-speaking countries. One of the presumable side effects of this is to reduce the range of the canon and to reinforce the status of the most canonical works. In other words, fewer authors tend to receive critical treatment, which tends to favour those who are positioned at the top of the canon. This is also true of historical periods and of literary genres: with the trend for metaphysical poets and the strong degree of canonicity ascribed to Shakespeare's tragedies, the 17th century is given more attention than the 16th century, and drama is regarded as more important than poetry. This can partly explain why an author like Drayton has not been studied in France until recently, while Anglo-Saxon criticism has irregularly, but repeatedly focused on his works.[53] But there are other academic factors to be taken into consideration.

18 Academic curricula of English in French universities are devoted to training specialists of English language and culture. The students follow classes on literature, of course, but also on language, translation, linguistics and civilization (the latter dealing with history and social representations, to put things very roughly), so that only a few hours can be devoted to literature each week, during which time the students are encouraged to become acquainted with a field of literature whose chronological (from the Middle-ages to the contemporary period) and geographical (the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, and literature from the Commonwealth and former British colonies) ranges are immense. This aspect is still reinforced by certain pedagogical practices and by the modalities of student assessment: the French *commentaire de texte* and *dissertation*[54] are highly formal exercises that imply a strong focus on specific texts. The *commentaire de texte*, in particular, has much in common with the techniques of new criticism and with French literary structuralism. As a consequence, it can be more relevant for academics to focus on a few authors and a few works in their teaching than on survey courses encouraging the students to read extensively. The focus on such exercises can be explained by the prominence of the *concours*¸ or competitive exams, in the French academic system.

19 The main professional outcome of studies of English in France has long been teaching in secondary education. To become secondary school teachers, French students need to take one of two competitive exams after their *Licence*:[55] the *CAPES* (*Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second degré*) or the prestigious *agrégation*, in which,

until a recent date, literature and civilization were assessed through *dissertations* and *commentaires de textes*.[56] Because of the highly selective nature of those exams and the formal complexity of both the *dissertation* and the *commentaire de texte*, it is in the academics' best interest to tailor their teaching to the requirements of these exercises, and thus, for instance, to train their students to practice in-depth formal analyses of specific works. Moreover, although the agrégation is initially aimed at training secondary school teachers, it has become customary if not compulsory to be an *agrégé* to teach in higher education. The programme of the *agrégation* also shapes to an extent the research that is produced in the country, as it both mirrors the interests of the academics standing in the jury of the *agrégation* and stimulates the interest of would-be doctoral students for the chosen works and authors. The prestige of the *agrégation* and its central role also entail that its programme is a both a production and a rather reliable reflection of the canon at a given moment.

20 The programmes of the agrégation since 1946[57] tend to mirror the structure of the canon as I have described it above: [58] many more dramatic than poetic works have been studied, the 17th century dominates, and 17 th-century poetry has been on the programme more than twice as often as 16 th-century poetry.[59] The evolution of the *agrégation* must be taken into consideration: from 1946 to 1963, the programme was composed of twelve works of literature, a number which was reduced to ten in 1964, and to seven after the 1997 reform.[60] The reduction of the total number of works logically corresponds to a restriction of the range of authors studied: from 1997 onwards, the only 16th- and 17th- drama that was studied was Shakespeare's. The poetry of the period that was on the program was either Shakespeare's (*Venus and Adonis*, 1999) or that of the metaphysical poets (George Herbert, 1997, 1998; John Donne, 2002). Overall, if 1997 was a turning point, it could be argued that the limitation of the number of works under study only amplified what had been an ongoing tendency for years. Indeed, while from 1946 to the 1960s, a fairly similar amount of 16th- and 17th-century poets were on the program,[61] things became much more unbalanced in the subsequent decades. From 1962 to 2015, 16th-century poetry was only studied three times (Shakespeare's *Sonnets*,[62] 1967 and 1981, *Venus and Adonis*, 1999). One reason for this exclusive focus on Shakespeare could have been the need for available and affordable editions of the works studied, which would definitely have been a problem for the study of Drayton's poems, for instance. However, no such difficulty existed for Spenser (whose work was on the programme in 1948, 1953 and 1957) and Sidney (agrégation students had to study *Astrophil and Stella* in 1958). It seems therefore that the restriction of the range of authors studied, at least as far as poetry was concerned, as well as the quasi-exclusive focus on drama, happened precisely as young scholars felt finally free to work on Shakespeare's theatre. The scant attention devoted to 16th-century poetry might therefore have been a side-effect of the feeling of liberation Jean-Marie Maguin describes in his article on the rise of French Shakespearean studies (see above).

Conventions as clichés, or Petrarch read through Shakespeare

21 What other conclusions can be inferred are more tentative. They must be understood as suggestions rather than statements. My hypothesis is that the knowledge French

scholars have had of the Elizabethan sonnet (and especially of its Petrarchan dimension) and of the criticism written on it since the 1970s has been conditioned by this context, and has often been mediated by sources that only dealt with the sonnets in an indirect way. It is telling, for instance, that such an important work in the historiography of the Elizabethan sonnet as Thomas P. Roche's *Petrarch and the English sonnet Sequences*[63] does not appear in SUDOC. Given the circumstances, it seems logical that the Elizabethan sonneteers should be known through Shakespeare's plays, and in particular through texts often analysed (including in the British and American traditions) as parodies and/or criticisms of the Petrarchan tradition denouncing its *clichés*. This vision of these texts is of course relevant, but it is also misleading and restrictive, as I have argued elsewhere.[64] Petrarchism was not just something to be mocked in the 1590s (something that in itself testifies to its success); it was also a relatively new poetic mode to the English, and it was central to the expression of love.[65]

22 In that context, it is no wonder that little has been written on the Elizabethan sonnet in France (with the notable exception of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, which, however, have been more often translated than commented). The year 2005, however, saw significant evolutions: the first French PhD on the Elizabethan sonneteers was defended,[66] and the *Société Française Shakespeare* chose to devote its annual conference to Shakespeare as a Poet. In his foreword, Pierre Kapitaniak states that "the new century seems to usher in a new dawn for poetry as a central component of Shakespearean studies".[67] The volume contains, among other papers, an article by Christine Sukič about Shakespeare, but also two other sonneteers: Samuel Daniel and Sir Philip Sidney. However, the introductory lesson by Yves Bonnefoy, entitled "Quelques propositions quant aux sonnets de Shakespeare",[68] passes harsh judgement on the sonneteers. The French poet (whose underlying purpose is to define the essence of poetry rather than put Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in a historical perspective) describes the context in which Shakespeare wrote his sonnets:

> In literary circles, there is that vogue for sonnets, with all the mediocrity and obvious superficiality it carries, in texts in which the brazen sonneteer indulges in exclamations that are supposed to stand for a true and deep experience— everywhere, there is that fake lyricism, which can only irritate those who know what authentic poetry is. Those can only denounce that counterfeiting of true lyricism.
> (Dans la société littéraire, c'est cette vogue des sonnets, avec ce qu'elle apporte de médiocrité, d'évidente superficialité, dans des textes où pourtant le sonnettiste éhonté ne se prive pas des exclamations qui se prétendent le signe d'une expérience profonde : de toutes parts un lyrisme factice, bien de quoi irriter ceux qui savent ce qu'est la poésie authentique. Bien de quoi les pousser à la dénonciation de ces contrefaçons du véritable lyrisme.)[69]

Bonnefoy's statement reads as a negative exposition of Romantic and post-Romantic criteria of literariness. The "superficiality" that he denounces contrasts with the notion of depth (in Bonnefoy's words, "true lyricism") that was expressed by Le Tourneur or Hugo; poetry must arise from deep experience, that is, it must be sincere. The harsh criticism that Bonnefoy levels at other sonneteers relies on categories that late 16th-century poets did not necessarily have in mind, and his definition of lyricism is historically much more relevant to works produced after the mid-18th century. As J.W. Lever put it as early as 1956, "appreciation [of the Elizabethan sonneteers] still suffers from the late-Romantic antipathy to form and convention, caused by the assumption that poetry should provide emotional self-revelation".[70] This dimension of "emotional

self-revelation," and maybe of sympathy between author-poet and reader is perhaps implicit in Bonnefoy's statement. The cultural importance of Bonnefoy's translations of *The Sonnets*, and his connections with academia (exemplified in the above-quoted article) are indications that Romantic Shakespeare remains at least one major way in which the poet and dramatist is received in France.

Conclusion

23 The conclusion is obvious: Shakespeare is not to blame, but the criteria and methods that have been established to put forward his great works of literature might be. If Elizabethan sonneteers have hardly been studied in France until recently, it is probably due, among other factors, to the combination of the (probably unwilling) persistence of a Romantic and post-Romantic conception of literature on the one hand and the organisation of French academic life on the other. In those conditions, it is very tempting to use the Elizabethan Petrarchan sonnet as a foil against which Shakespeare's works can be set. The Romantic conception of literature—which in many ways has been a very useful one, since it has most probably played an important role in the French interest for Shakespeare—has sometimes led critics to mistake conventions, or rather commonplaces (a central feature of 16th-century poetics) for clichés, and to underestimate the complexity of the works of minor poets, in their desire to claim Shakespeare's subversive genius.

24 However, it is perhaps precisely because the sonnet sequences question these conceptions that they can be inspiring today: they incite us to re-think such dichotomies as sincerity vs. conventionality, unity vs. fragmentation, narrativity vs. seriality and repetition, etc. In the last twenty-five years, the way we understand the sonnet sequences has been renewed by British and American studies focusing on religion, gender or book history.[71] Meanwhile, French scholars have been inclined to underline the need to study and publish other writers than Shakespeare,[72] and these new perspectives will no doubt benefit the Elizabethan sonnets, but also our understanding of Elizabethan and Jacobean literature at large, including Shakespeare's great achievements.

NOTES

1. Peter Stallybrass, "Editing as Cultural Formation: the Sexing of Shakespeare's Sonnets," in James Schiffer, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, New York, London, Garland Publishing, 2000, p. 76.

2. Margreta De Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790s Apparatus*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991.

3. Christopher Warley, *Sonnet Sequences and Social Distinction in Renaissance England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, and particularly the second chapter p.19-44.

4. This table is reproduced in Russell Noyes, *Drayton's Literary Vogue since 1631*, Indiana University Studies, Vol. XXII, Bloomington, Indiana University, 1935, p. 13.

5. See Alexander's commendatory verse in the 1600 edition of *Englands Heroicall Epistles. Newly corrected. With Idea*, London, printed by J[ames] R[oberts] for N[icholas] L[inge], 1600.
6. Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon : the Books and School of the Ages*, New York, San Diego, London, Harcourt Brace & company, 1994, p. 536.
7. "JAMAIS, en effet, homme de génie ne pénétra plus avant que SHAKESPEARE dans l'abîme du cœur humain, & ne fit mieux parler aux passions le langage de la Nature" (Pierre Le Tourneur, *Préface du Shakespeare traduit de l'anglois*, ed. Jacques Dury, Genève, Droz, 1990, p. ii).
8. *Ibid.*, p. lxxvi.
9. *Ibid.*, p. lxxv.
10. *Ibid.*, p. lxxiv-lxxv.
11. *Ibid.*, p. xcv.
12. François-Victor Hugo, *Les Sonnets de William Shakespeare, traduits pour la première fois en entier*, Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1857, p. 5. All the translations in this paper are my own.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.
15. *William Shakespeare* [1864], Paris, Flammarion, 1973, p. 38.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 38, 184. Victor Hugo explicitly describes the works of geniuses as sublime p. 224.
17. "Mais aussi ce Shakespeare ne respecte rien, il va devant lui, il essouffle qui veut le suivre ; il enjambe les convenances, il culbute Aristote ; il fait des dégâts dans le jésuitisme, dans le méthodisme, dans le purisme et le puritanisme ; il met Loyola en désordre et Wesley sens dessus dessous ; il est vaillant, hardi, entreprenant, militant, direct" (*Ibid.*, p. 182).
18. Hugo's idea that the poet must educate the people is part of his belief in progress and his socialist convictions. The role of the poet is to complete what began with the French revolution: the liberation of minds must follow the liberation of bodies. See p. 244-251, 266-273 and 308-309.
19. "Hugo's claim that 'Shakespeare must be translated' because 'Socialism aims at the elevation of the masses'—the 'vast mournful heap of suffering' for which the Bard speaks as he looks down at the poor 'in depths of the shadows'—drew upon the specifically Parisian response to the plays as the people's voice" (Richard Wilson, *Shakespeare in French Theory: king of shadows*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2007, p. 45).
20. *Op. cit.*, p. 170 and 174.
21. See Sidney Lee, *English Sonnets, newly arranged and indexed*, Westminster, A. Constable & Co. ltd., 1904, p. xix-xx and xxxiv and *A Life of William Shakespeare* [1898], Royston, Oracle, 1996, p. 83-124.
22. H.J.C. Grierson, ed, *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* [1921], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. xix-xx.
23. See: *Sonnet Sequences and Social Distinction in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, and especially Chapter 2: "Post-romantic lyric: class and the critical apparatus of sonnet conventions", p. 19-44.
24. In 1803, Wordsworth said the sonnets to the dark lady "[were] worse than a puzzle-peg. They are abominably harsh, obscure, and worthless", while the others, which he recognized were "much better" and have "many fine lines", had the following faults: "sameness, tediousness, quaintness, and elaborate obscurity". See Peter Jones, ed., *Shakespeare: The Sonnets,* London, MacMillan, 1977, p. 41. In 1821, Hazlitt wrote that the sonnets were "overcharged and monotonous", and, voicing his opinion of the whole sequence, added: "I can make neither head nor tail of it". See *Table Talk. Or, Original Essays,* London, John Warren, Old Bond Street, 1821, volume II, Essay II "On Milton's Sonnets" (https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/hazlitt/william/table-talk/v2.2.html, last accessed 23 March 2015). In 1875, Edward Dowden stated that "The Shakspere [sic] whom we discern in the sonnets had certainly not attained the broad mastery of life which the Stratford bust asserts to have been Shakespere's in his closing years" (*Shakspere: a*

critical study of his mind and art, New York and London, Harper & brothers publishers, 1881 [1872], p.353).

25. The most remarkable and innovative of the works published about Elizabethan sonnets prior to the 1960s—especially in the way in the way it reconceptualised the notion of convention—was J.W. Lever's *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet,* London, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1956.

26. "Shakespeare Studies in France since 1960", *Shakespeare Around the Globe*, University of Victoria, Internet Shakespeare Editions, 2002-2004 (http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Criticism/shakespearein/france/;jsessionid=405EC08611D936EE34B783FF97AC1664, last accessed 10 April 2015).

27. *Ibid.*

28. Henri Fluchère, *Shakespeare, dramaturge élisabéthain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

30. *Ibid*. One of the targets of Fluchère's attacks is probably André Suarès and his *Poète tragique: essai sur Prospéro*, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, éditeurs, 1952.

31. Jean Fuzier, *Les Sonnets de Shakespeare*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1970.

32. *Ibid.*, p.308-310.

33. Such as William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1930.

34. *Op. cit.*, p.29-31, a subchapter entitled "Artisans et artistes : le problème de la sincérité".

35. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 32. This passage shows that Fuzier understands conventions as borrowings from sources, which in turn explain the fact that for him, using conventions was hardly distinguishable from plagiarism.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

38. *Op cit.*, p. 82-92 and 136-137.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 84-85.

40. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, p. 3.

41. *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

42. *L'inspiration personnelle et l'esprit du temps chez les poètes métaphysiques anglais*, Paris, José Corti, 1955-1960.

43. *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

44. SUDOC is the online catalogue of French university libraries.

45. The translations are a major aspect of the reception of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* in France. Typing the keywords "Shakespeare" and "Sonnets" for books published between 1980 and 2015 into the SUDOC search engine, one obtains a list of 37 works, only 13 of which are not partial or complete translations of *The Sonnets*.

46. Significantly, only one of those two PhD authors is a specialist of English literature. Most of the scientific production on *Shakespeare's Sonnets* in France over the last decades has been authored by experienced researchers. This can be partly (but as I hope to show not exclusively) attributed to difficulty of the *Sonnets* and the sobering amount of criticism written on them in English-speaking countries.

47. *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

51. This is Jean-Louis Barrault's vision of Shakespeare according to Richard Wilson. *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.

52. See also John Pemble's *Shakespeare Goes to Paris: How the Bard Conquered France*, London, New York, Hambledon and London, 2005. Though entertaining and informative, this book must be read with caution: it is not devoid of methodological flaws, and contains occasional, and rather

serious, mistakes (I do not think Sartre would have appreciated to be compared to Hippolyte Taine, for instance!).

53. For an account of the reception of Michael Drayton's poetry and more especially of his sonnets, see Rémi Vuillemin, *Le Recueil pétrarquiste à l'ère du maniérisme : poétique des sonnets de Michael Drayton, 1594-1619*, Paris, Honoré Champion, p.77-111.

54. Specialists of English are generally given *dissertations* focusing on one author and one work only.

55. Before 2010, students could take the *CAPES* the year after graduation; they needed to complete one more year of study to take the *agrégation*. Since then, the validation of a full Master's Degree (to be completed at the same time as taking the CAPES and before taking the agrégation) has been necessary.

56. Since 2010, the CAPES has no longer included those exercises.

57. More information can also be found on the website of the SAES (Société Française des Anglicistes de l'Enseigbnement Supérieur). The programmes of the *agrégation* from 1946 to 1997 have conveniently been gathered on the agrèg-ink website. See http://www.saesfrance.org/ and http://agreg-ink.net/index.php?
title=Annales_des_concours_de_l%27Education_Nationale_%28les%29 (both last accessed on 25 August 2015).

58. I have based my account on the probable dates of composition of the works. Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are therefore counted as a 16th-century work.

59. As far as Shakespearean works are concerned, the domination of the 17th-century is, however, not obvious. If slightly more 17th-century plays seem to have been studied (I have counted 36, as opposed to 29 16th-century dramatic works), this difference does not appear significant, as the date of composition of many plays is not absolutely certain.

60. I include the "optional" works in my account. Those were only studied by students who chose to specialize in literature.

61. I have numbered seven for the 16th century and eight for the 17th century.

62. See note 58.

63. Thomas P. Roche, Jr, *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences*, New York, AMS, 1989.

64. See "'Love with excess of heat': the sonnet and Petrarchan excess in the late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean periods", Revue de la Société d'Études Anglo-Américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles 71 (2014), 99-120.

65. Shakespeare's sonnet 130, to take but one of the most famous examples, is highly Petrarchan in its structure and its sources, and does something much more complex than poking fun at the Petrarchan blazon: it incorporates both the tradition of the blazon and the tradition of the counterblazon (itself a component of the Petrarchan tradition since at least Berni) to praise a lady (whatever the ambiguity of the praise in the context of the sequence).

66. Gaëlle Ginestet, *L'Ecriture mythologique dans les sonnets amoureux élisabéthains*, dir. Yves Peyré and Charles Whitworth, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3, 2005.

67. "Le nouveau siècle semble annoncer un retour de la poésie au premier plan des études shakespeariennes". See Pierre Kapitaniak and Yves Peyré, eds., *Shakespeare Poète*, Paris, Société Française Shakespeare, 2007, p.5.

68. *Ibid*, p. 13-38.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 32-33.

70. *Op. cit.*, p. v.

71. See for instance: Roche, *op. cit.*; Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance*, Ithaca, London, Cornell University Press, 1993; Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*, Ithaca, London, Cornell University Press, 1995;

Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections and the Making of Renaissance Literature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

72. See: Line Cottegnies's introduction to *Théâtre élisabéthain*, ed. Line Cottegnies, François Laroque and Jean-Marie Maguin, bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, Gallimard, 2009.

ABSTRACTS

This paper attempts to uncover some of the reasons why the Elizabethan sonnet sequences have received little critical attention in France. It quickly appears that such neglect might be attributed to the continuing centrality of the Romantic construction of Shakespeare as a sublime figure that embodies Nature and as a "man of the mob" (Richard Wilson). Such a conception has been detrimental to the study of the Elizabethan sonneteers, who have often been seen as poetasters slavishly responding to the requests of powerful patrons by producing artificial, derivative and conventional poems. They have also suffered from the consequences of a more or less implicit periodization which values the culture of the early 17th century over that of the late 16th century. Such conceptions have weighed on the formation of the canon in a research field comprising comparatively few academics in France, restricting the range of authors studied and making Shakespeare's aura even brighter. Other factors, such as the centrality of the competitive exams (CAPES, agrégation) and the format of traditional pedagogical exercises might have played an indirect role as well. A renewal of interest in Elizabethan poetry seems to have occurred in French academia since the mid-2000s notwithstanding.

Cet article tente de comprendre pourquoi le sonnet élisabéthain a été peu étudié en France. Il apparaît rapidement que ce manque d'intérêt tient à la survivance de critères de littérarité trouvant leur origine chez les Romantiques, qui firent de Shakespeare un homme du peuple, une figure sublime incarnant la Nature. Par contraste, les sonnettistes tendent à être perçus comme des rimailleurs engoncés dans les clichés, écrivant des pièces artificielles, peu imaginatives et conventionnelles. Ils ont aussi pâti des conséquences d'une périodisation plus ou moins implicite qui valorise la production culturelle du XVIIe siècle naissant au détriment de celle du XVIe siècle finissant. Ces conceptions ont influé sur la configuration du canon en France, en renforçant encore l'aura de Shakespeare dans un champ de recherches comprenant un nombre restreint de spécialistes par comparaison avec les pays anglo-saxons. Cet état de fait a mécaniquement limité le nombre d'auteurs abordés par les critiques français. D'autres facteurs tels que la centralité des concours ou la nature des exercices pédagogiques privilégiés en France ont également pu jouer un rôle. Ces aspects n'ont cependant pas empêché des évolutions encourageantes de voir le jour depuis le milieu des années 2000.

INDEX

Mots-clés: critique shakespearienne, Pétrarquisme, réception, recueils de sonnets, Romantisme, Shakespeare en France

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